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SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA: FM BAKOYANNIS BRIEFS PARLIAMENT
ON NAME ISSUE

REF: EMBASSY ATHENS E-MAIL OF 10/21/08

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel V. Speckhard for 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) FM Bakoyannis told the Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Foreign Affairs October 29 that Greece will work from the most recent Nimetz proposal as a basis, but that certain (unspecified) changes are required. She asserted that Greece seeks a new, compound name with a geographic qualifier that will be used for all uses "erga omnes." She criticized Macedonian PM Gruevski's "nationalist approach" to the issue, but expressed Greece's desire to see Macedonia achieve its Euro-Atlantic prospects. Opposition political parties criticized the GoG's handling of the issue, with a particular emphasis on perceived "collusion" between the USG and Nimetz - citing the leaked Embassy Skopje cable and its concomitant media furor (reftel). From our perspective, FM Bakoyannis walked a fine line -) using tough language to reiterate longstanding Greek positions on the name issue, while declining to join in the opposition's overwrought conspiracy theories about Nimetz and the "Skopje telegram." End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On October 29 FM Dora Bakoyannis briefed the Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Foreign Affairs on the Macedonia name issue and the GoG's position on the latest Nimetz proposal. MPs had requested her briefing following release in the Greek press of a July cable from Embassy Skopje on the name issue and the ensuing media furor (reftel). Bakoyannis said the most recent Nimetz proposal "is not satisfactory" for Greece in its present form but could be the basis for a solution, provided amendments are made. She said Greece will provide Nimetz with detailed comments in "the near future." Greece, Bakoyannis said, is not "going slow," but at the same time it is "not in a hurry." She underlined that Greece had not changed its position. It is "crystal clear," she said, that Greece seeks a compound name with a geographic qualifier for all uses ("erga omnes"), as PM Karamanlis had previously told Parliament.

¶3. (SBU) Bakoyannis strongly criticized Macedonian PM Gruevski for fomenting "nationalism" among the population with the aim of personal political gain. "The people of FYROM," Bakoyannis said, should realize that "Greece is a friend" and that "19th century" attitudes and practices will lead nowhere. Already, she said, the EU has given the message that it will not open accession negotiations with Macedonia. Macedonia's "Euro-Atlantic accession future" has been similarly affected. Furthermore, Bakoyannis underlined, Greece receives "conflicting signals" from the Macedonian leadership, with President and Prime Minister often expressing opposing views. She said this divergence needs to be addressed before any progress in the negotiations can take

place -- because Greece is not willing to deal with "provisional" agreements that do not have universal support in Skopje. Greece, "in contrast to Mr. Gruevski," believes in "FYROM's ... Euro-Atlantic future" and wishes to see "all its neighbors" integrated with Euro-Atlantic structures, Bakoyannis concluded.

¶4. (SBU) In their remarks, all opposition parties, with PASOK leading, keyed off sensationalist allegations in the press that the USG had supposedly colluded with Nimetz on his latest proposal, and demanded to know why Bakoyannis did not ask for an explanation from Nimetz; some referred to him as a "U.S. agent." PASOK demanded that the Nimetz proposal be rejected as the basis of negotiations, and the extreme right LAOS party called for the UN-led talks to cease immediately.

¶5. (C) Comment: In her public statements Bakoyannis sought to walk a fine line -) using tough language to reiterate longstanding Greek positions on the name issue, while declining to join in the opposition's overwrought conspiracy theories about Nimetz and the "Skopje telegram." The opposition's comments should be seen more in the light of internal Greek politics than an actual expression of opposition views on the mos recent Nimetz proposal -- which hs not bee formally released to the public. Given the media furor over the Embassy Skopje telegram and the government's myriad other problems -- includin lower poll numbers and idspread angst ove the financial situation --may Geek undis are star ting to suggestthat he GG woldbe better advised to wait ntil a ne U.S admnistrat ion takes office before making any further moves on the name issue. However, we assess that the GOG remains willing to

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work from the most recent Nimetz proposal as a basis for work - albeit with desired changes. Furthermore, Bakoyannis did not close any doors in her remarks to Parliament. End Comment.
SPECKHARD